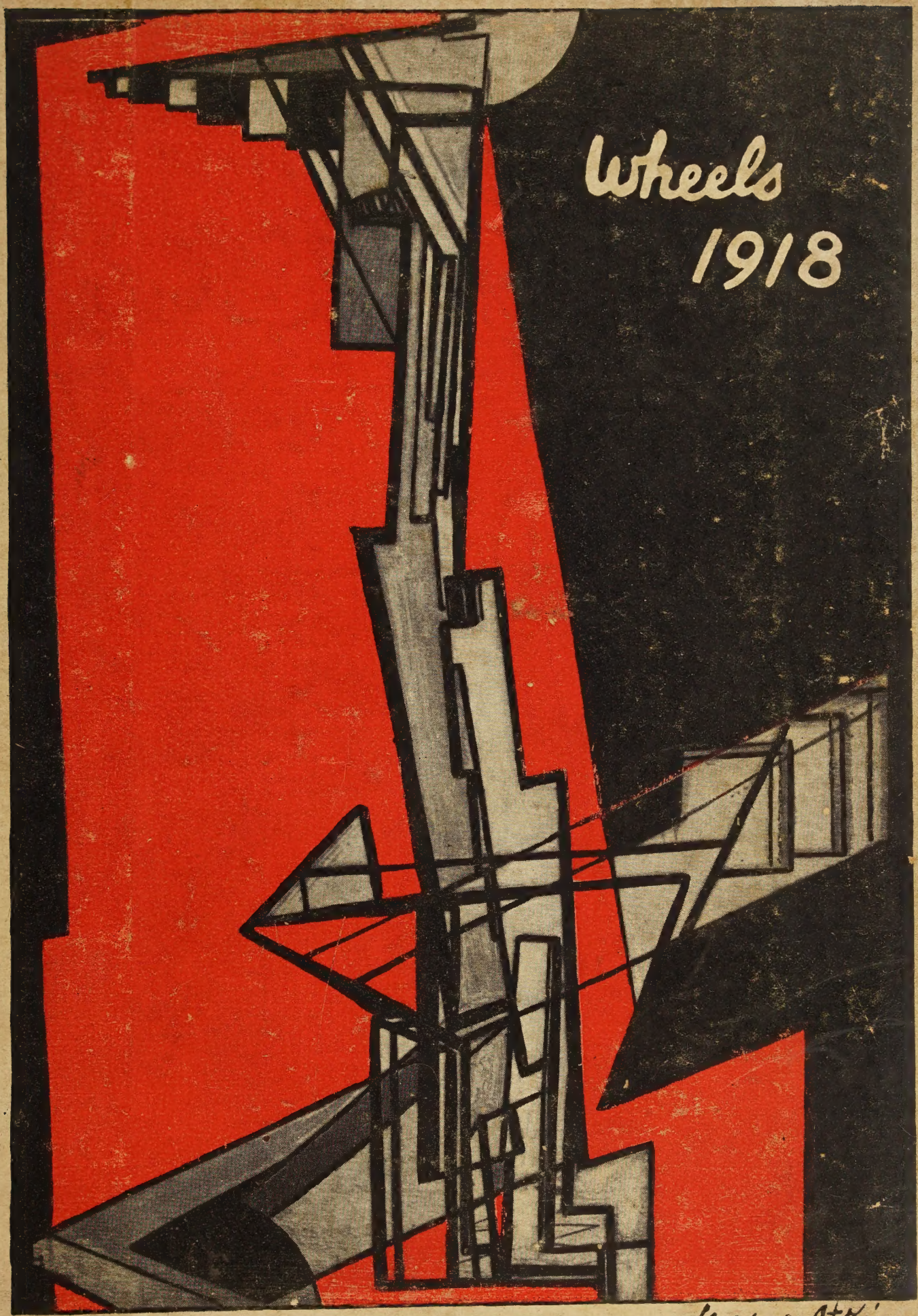

The Sky Pilot.

Laurence Atkinson

WHEELS, 1918

THIRD CYCLE

EDITED BY EDITH SITWELL

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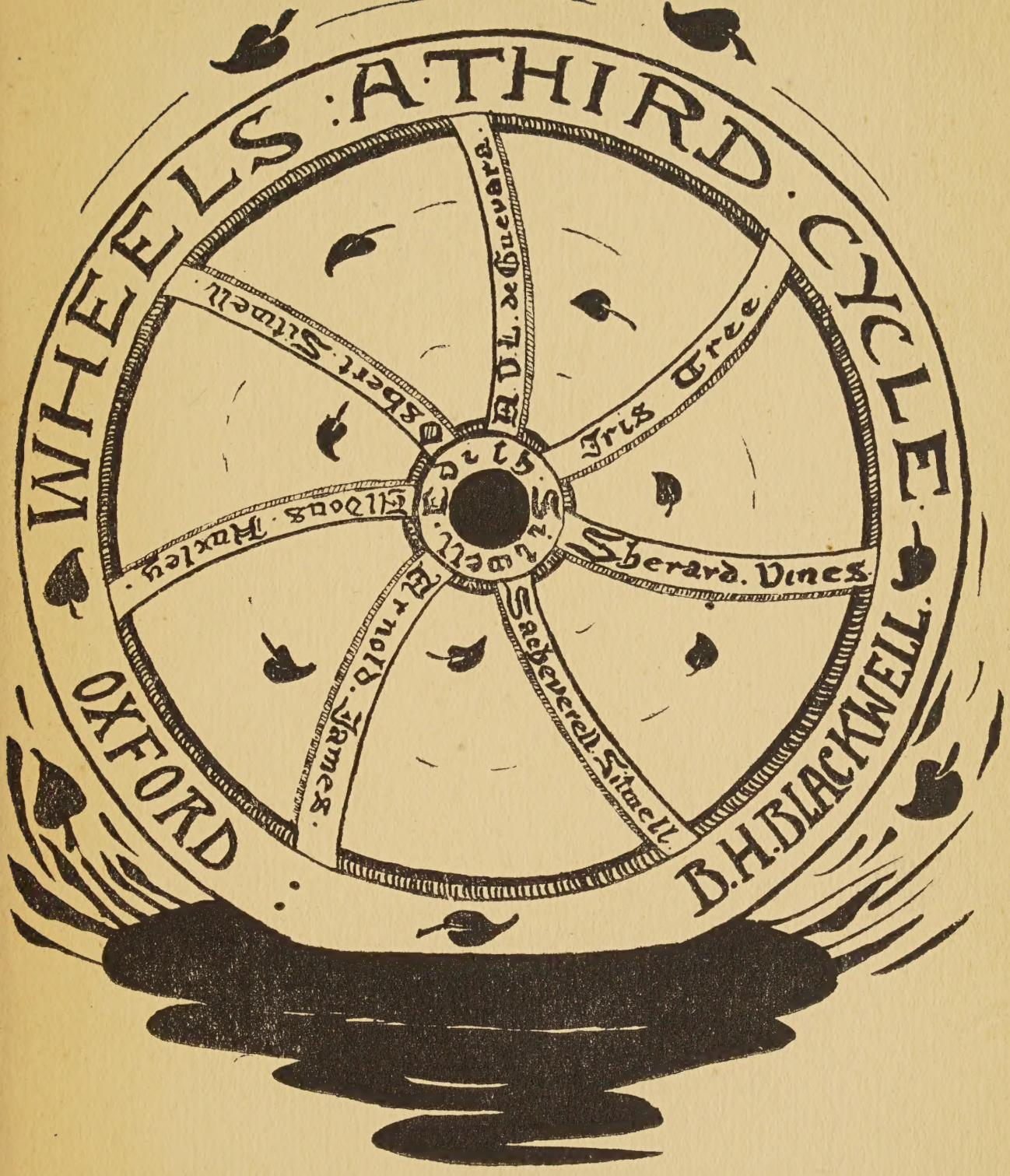
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CONTENTS

PAGE

OSBERT SITWELL

London Squares 9
Clavichords 11
Metamorphosis 13
This Generation 15
Youth and Age 16
Song of the Fauns 17

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Zoo Celeste 19
Fatigue 20
The Merry-go-round 21
Gothic 23
Evening Party 24
Beauty 25

ARNOLD JAMES

The Exile 36
The Poet's Task 37
God called me to His Side 38
Now from Light of the Sun 39

ALVARO VELEZ LADRON DE GUEVARA—Translation

Two Fragments from the Spanish 40

SACHEVERELL SITWELL.

Fables 43
Fountains 45
'Psittachus Eois Imitatrix Ales Ab Indis' ... 47
'Whitsun' 49
Pindar 51
Outskirts 54

CONTENTS—*continued.*

IRIS TREE

REBELLION 57
CONFESSIONAL 58
ROSE 60
ANALYSIS 61
REVISION 62
ROMANCE 64
GOURMET 65
RETURN 66
ISLANDS 67

SHERARD VINES

PREDESTINATION 68
CLERK'S SONG 69
SUNRISE 70
LITTLE MOTHER OF SORROWS 72
PANDEMOS 73
A NEW BALLAD OF DIVES AND LAZARUS 75
THE PROPHET 77
A SONG FOR GROCERS 78
WAR-STRIKE 80

EDITH SITWELL

SUGAR FOR THE BIRDS—SINGERIE 81
THE AVENUE 83
THE BLACKAMOOR GOES TO HELL 85
SWITCHBACK 86
FALSETTO SONG 87
STOPPING PLACE 88
MYSELF ON THE MERRY-GO-ROUND 90
APRICOT JAM 93
SONG FROM 'THE QUEEN OF PALMYRIA' 95
TWO NOCTURNES 96

OSBERT SITWELL.

LONDON SQUARES.

TO-NIGHT this city seems delirious. The air
Is fever'd, hot and heavy—yet each street
Each tortuous lane and slumb'ring stone-bound square
Smells of the open woods, so wild and sweet.
Through the dim spaces, where each town-bred tree
Sweeps out, mysterious and tall and still
The country's passionate spirit—old and free—
Flings off the fetters of the calm and chill.

There in the garden, fauns leap out and sing—
Chant those strange sun-born songs from far away!
With joyous ecstasy in this new spring,
They cast the coats and top-hats of the day.

There by the railings, where the women pace
With painted faces, passionless and dead,
Out of the dark Pan shows his leering face,
Mocks their large hats and faces painted red.

Then as they walk away, he mocks their lives,
Racking each wearied soul with lost desires,
And—cruelty more subtle, he contrives
With aching memories of love's first fires
To tune their hearts up to a different key.
So, when they sleep, the withered years unfold,
—Again, as children round a mother's knee
They listen to their future as foretold
—A future rich and innocent and gay.

Then wake up to the agony of day!

CLAVICHORDS.

To Mrs. Gordon Woodhouse.

ITS pure and dulcet tone
So clear and cool
Rings out—tho' muffled by the centuries
Passed by ;
Each note
A distant sigh
From some dead lovely throat.

A sad cascade of sound
Floods the dim room with faded memories
of beauty that has gone
Like the reflected rhythm in some dusk blue pool,
of dancing figures (long laid in the ground) ;—
Like moonlit skies
Or some far song harmonious and sublime—
Breaking the leaden slumber of the night.
A perfume, faint yet fair
As of an old press'd blossom that 's reborn
Seeming to flower alone
within the arid wilderness of Time.

. . . . .

Clavichords.

The music fills the air
Soft as the outspread fluttering wings
of flower-bright butterflies
That dive and float
Through the sweet rose-flushed hours of summer dawn.
The rippling sound of silver strings
Break o'er our senses as small foaming waves
Break over rocks,
And into hidden caves
of silent waters—never to be found—
Waters as clear and glistening as gems.

And in this ancient pool of melodies,
So soothing, deep,
We search for strange lost images and diadems
And old drowned pleasures,
—Each one shining bright
And rescued from the crystal depths of sleep.

. . . . .

As the far sun-kissed sails of some full-rigged boat
Blown by a salt cool breeze
—Laden with age-old treasures
And rich merchandise,
Fade into evening on the foam-flecked seas,—
So this last glowing note
Hovers a while,—then dies.

METAMORPHOSIS.

THE woods that ever love the moon, rest calm and white
Beneath a mist-wrapp'd hill:
An owl, horned wizard of the night,
Flaps through the air so soft and still;
Moaning, it wings its flight
Far from the forest cool,
To find the star-entangled surface of a pool,
Where it may drink its fill
Of stars; a blossom-laden breeze
Scatters its treasures—each a fallen moon
Among the waiting trees,—
Bears back the faded shadow-scents of noon.

. . . . .

The whispering wood is full of dim, vague fears.
The rustling branches sway
And listen for some sound from far away
—A silver piping down the pagan years
Since Time's first joyous birth—
The listening trees all sigh,
The moment of their hornèd king is nigh.

Metamorphosis.

Then, peal on peal, there sounds the fierce wild mirth
Of Pan their master, lord and king,—
And round him in a moonlit ring
His court, so wan and sly!

. . . . .

But then the trees closed round, and hid from sight
Their deeds,—the voices seemed to die.

. . . . .

An owl, horned wizard of the night
Flaps through the air, so soft and still.
Moans, as it wings its flight
Toward the mist-wrapp'd hill.

OSBERT SITWELL.

THIS GENERATION.

(From *Everyman.*)

TO HELEN.

THEIR youth was fevered—passionate, quick to drain
The last few pleasures from this cup of life
Before they turn'd to such the dregs of pain
And end their young-old lives in mortal strife.
They paid the debts of many a hundred year
Of foolishness and riches in alloy.
They went to death; nor did they shed a tear
For all they sacrificed of love and joy.
Their tears ran dry when they were in the womb,
For, entering life—they found it was their tomb.

1917.

OSBERT SITWELL.

YOUTH AND AGE.

I.

YOUTH.

OUTSIDE the church the mourning children cried
For some old man who died of ripe old age,
Mourning his short appearance on this stage.
They said: 'He was but seventy, and then he died.'

II.

THE OLD.

THROUGHOUT this dreadful war we sit and sigh,
For all the youthful millions that must die.
Yet still we see God's mercy, and we say
'They knew not sorrow, cast their lives away
In all their powerful promise of the spring.
They saw not autumn, thus were doubly blest;'
'They never lost their faculties' we sing,
Warming our withered hands; 'Perhaps it's for the best.
Their loss was cruel, or shall we say their gain,
Yet it's the country's glory, and its pain.'
And thus eternally old age shall sit
Mouthing youth's sorrows for its benefit.
Why can't the old keep quiet, and sit and sigh?
Or, failing that, why can't they fail and die?

SONG OF THE FAUNS.

WHEN woods are white beneath the moon
And grass is wet with crystal dew,
When in the pool
So clear and cool
The moon reflects itself anew,
We raise ourselves from daylight's swoon
We shake away
The sleep of day,
Out from our bosky homes we spring,
Horns wreathed with flowers
Throughout the hours
Of moonlight, worshipping we sing.
Pale iv'ry Goddess whose wan light
Looks down upon us worshipping—
Each dappled faun
Who shuns the dawn,
Is here, and rarest gifts we bring—

Song of the Fauns.

The feathers of the birds of night
Wrought to a crown
Of softest down
We offer you, and crystal bright,
The dew within a lily cup
Reflecting stars
In shining bars ;
All things most strange we offer up—
Rich gifts of fruit and honeyed flowers
To place within your secret bowers.
We shake down apples from the trees
And pears, and plums with velvet skin :
Up to the sky
We cast these high
And pray you 'll stoop to net these in.
We dance : then fall upon our knees
And pray and sing—all this to show
The love that all loyal fauns must owe
To you, white goddess of the night.
But no more play
We must away,
The eastern sky is growing bright.

ZOO CELESTE.

AU coin le plus obscur du jardin des déesses
Dort le Singe Idéal, dont les immenses fesses
Etalent de l'Azur les éblouissements.
Une Négresse allaite un troupeau d'éléphants,
Mignons d'Olympe, dont la trompe au pâles lèvres
S'enivre d'un lait noir et qui donne les fièvres ;
Puis, abreuvés ils vont, balançant sur le dos
Le haut machicoulis fantasque des châteaux
D'ivoire et de jais, broûter dans la prairie.
Les baleines de cuir, rêvant sur l'eau fleurie,
Font jaillir le cristal tournoyant de leur trombe,
Qui monte vers le ciel, se lasse, puis retombe
Avec un clapotis sonore de tambour
Sur les lotus gonflés de parfums et d'amour
Comme les chairs en feu de l'Anadyomène.
Voici, sur l'or de la plage qui se promène,
Béhemot ; et dans l'air voici le Roc géant,
Qui pond de temps à autre au giron du néant
De nouveaux univers complets, chacun garni
D'un petit Tout-Puissant qui se croit infini.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

FATIGUE.

THE mind has lost its Aristotelian elegance of shape: there is only a darkness where bubbles and inconsequent balloons float up to burst their luminous cheeks and vanish.

A woman with a basket on her head: a Chinese lantern quite askew: the vague bright bulging of chemists' window bottles; and then in my ears the distant noise of a great river of people. And phrases, phrases—

It is only a question of saddle-bags,

Stane Street and Gondibert,

Foals in Iceland (or was it Foals in aspic ?).

As that small reddish devil turns away with an insolent jut of his hind-quarters, I became aware that his curling pug's tail is an electric bell-push. But that does not disquiet me so much as the sight of all these polished statues twinkling with high lights and all of them grotesque and all of them colossal.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND.

THE machine is ready to start. The symbolic beasts grow resty, curvetting where they stand at their places in the great blue circle of the year. The Showman's voice rings out. 'Montez, mesdames et messieurs, montez. You, sir, must bestride the Ram. You will take the Scorpion. Yours, madame, is the Goat. As for you there, blackguard boy, you must be content with the Fishes. I have allotted you the Virgin, mademoiselle.' . . . 'Polisson!' 'Pardon, pardon. Evidemment, c'est le Sagittaire qu'on demande. Ohé, les dards! The rest must take what comes. The Twins shall counterpoise one another in the Scales. So, so. Now away we go, away.'

Ha, what keen air. Wind of the upper spaces. Snuff it deep, drink in the intoxication of our speed. Hark how the music swells and rings . . . sphery music, music of every vagabond planet, every rooted star; sound of winds and seas and all the simmering millions of life. Moving, singing . . . so with a roar and a rush round we go and round, for ever whirling on a ceaseless Bank Holiday of drunken life and speed.

The Merry-go-round.

But I happened to look inwards among the machinery of our roundabout, and there I saw a slobbering cretin grinding at a wheel and sweating as he ground and grinding eternally. And when I perceived that he was the author of all our speed and that the music was of his making, that everything depended on his grinding wheel, I thought I would like to get off. But we were going too fast.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

GOTHIC.

SHARP spires pierce upwards, and the clouds are full of tumbling bells. Reckless, break-neck, head over heels down an airy spiral of stairs run the bells. 'Upon Paul's steeple stands a tree.'

Up again and then once more to the bottom, two steps at a time. 'As full of apples as can be.'

Up again and down again: centuries of climbing have not worn the crystal smoothness of the degrees.

Along the bellying clouds the little boys of London Town come running, running as best they may, seeing that at every step they sink ankle-deep through the woolly surface into the black heart of thunder beneath.

The apples on the trees are swaying in the wind, rocking to the clamour of bells. The leaves are of bright green copper and rattle together with a scaly sound. At the roots of the tree sit four gargoyles playing a little serious game with dice. The hunch-backed ape has won from the manticore that crooked French crown with a hole in it which the manticore got from the friar with the strawberry nose; he had it in turn as an alms from the grave knight who lies with crossed legs down there, through the clouds and the dizzy mist of bell-ringing, where the great church is a hollow ship, full of bright candles, and stable in the midst of dark tempestuous seas.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

EVENING PARTY.

'SANS Espoir, sans Espoir, . . .' sang the lady while the piano laboriously opened its box of old sardines in treacle. One detected ptomaine in the syrup.

Sans Espoir, . . . I thought of the rhymes—soir, nonchaloir, reposoir—the dying falls of a symbolism grown sadly suicidal before the broad Flemish back of the singer, the dewlaps of her audience. Sans Espoir. The listeners wore the frozen rapture of those who gaze upon the uplifted Host.

Catching one another's eye, we had a simultaneous vision of pews, of hyenas and hysteria.

Three candles were burning. They behaved like English aristocrats in a French novel—perfectly, impassively. I tried to imitate their milordliness.

One of the candles flickered, snickered. Was it a draught or was it laughter?

Flickering, snickering—candles, you betrayed me. I had to laugh too.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

BEAUTY.

I.

THERE is a sea somewhere—whether in the lampless crypts of the earth, or among sunlit islands, or that which is an unfathomable and terrifying question between the archipelagos of stars—there is a sea (and perhaps its tides have filled those green transparent pools that glint like eyes in a spring storm-cloud) which is for ever troubled and in travail—a bubbling and a heaving up of waters as though for the birth of a fountain.

The sick and the crippled lie along the brims in expectation of the miracle. And at last, at last . . .

A funnel of white water is twisted up and so stands, straight and still by the very speed of its motion.

It drinks the light; slowly it is infused with colour, rose and mother-of-pearl. Slowly it takes shape, a heavenly body.

O dazzling Anadyomene!

The flakes of foam break into white birds about her head, fall again in a soft avalanche of flowers. Perpetual miracle, beauty endlessly born.

II.

Steamers, in all your travelling have you trailed the meshes of your long expiring white nets across this sea, or dipped in it your sliding rail, or balanced your shadow far far down upon its glass-green sand? Or, forgetting the pre-occupations of commerce and the well-oiled predestination of your machinery, did you ever put in at the real Paphos?

III.

In the city of Troy, whither our Argonautical voyages had carried us, we found Helen and that lamentable Cressid who was to Chaucer the feminine paradox, untenably fantastic but so devastatingly actual, the crystal ideal—flawed; and to Shakespeare the inevitable trull, flayed to show her physiological machinery and the logical conclusion of every the most heart-rendingly ingenuous gesture of maidenhood. (But, bless you! our gorge doesn't rise. We are cynically well up in the damning Theory of woman, which makes it all the more amusing to watch ourselves in the ecstatic practice of her. Unforeseen perversity.)

Fabulous Helen! At her firm breasts they used to mould delicate drinking cups which made the sourest vinegar richly poisonous.

The geometry of her body had utterly outwitted Euclid, and the Philosophers were baffled by curves of a subtlety infinitely more elusive aud Eleusinian than the most oracular speculations of Parmenides. They did their best to make a coherent system out of the incompatible, but empirically established, facts of her. Time, for instance, was abolished within the circle of her arms. 'It is eternity when her lips touch me,' Paris had remarked. And yet this same Paris was manifestly and notoriously falling into a decline, had lost whatever sense or beauty he once possessed, together with his

memory and all skill in the nine arts which are memory's daughters. How was it then, these perplexed philosophers wondered, that she could at one and the same moment give eternity like a goddess, while she was vampiring away with that divine thirsty mouth of hers the last dregs of a poor mortal life ? They sought an insufficient refuge in Heraclitus' theory of opposites.

Meanwhile Troilus was always to be found at sunset, pacing up and down the walls by the western gate—quite mad. At dusk the Greek camp-fires would blossom along Xanthus banks—one after another, a myriad lights dancing in the dark.

As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
O'er heaven's pure azure spreads her something light.

He would repeat the simile to himself, but could never remember the correct epithets. Not that they mattered—any more than anything else.

IV.

'There are fine cities in the world—Manhattan, Ecbatana and Hecatompylus—but this city of Troy is the most fabulous of them all. Rome was seven hills of butcher's meat, Athens an abstraction of marble, in Alexandria the steam of kidney-puddings revolted the coenobites, darkness and size render London inappreciable, Paris is full of sparrows, the snow lies gritty on Berlin, Moscow has no veri-similitude, all the East is peopled by masks and apes and larvae. But this city of Troy is most of all real and fabulous with its charnel beauty.

Is not Helen the end of our search—paradisal little World, symbol and epitome of the Great? Dawn sleeps in the transparent shadow of roses within her ear. The stainless candour of infinity—far-off peaks in summer and the Milky Way—has taken marvellous form in her. The Little World has its meteors, too, comets and shadowy clouds of hair, stars at whose glance men go planet-struck. Meteors—yes, and history it has. The past is still alive in the fragrance of her hair and her young body breathes forth memories as old as the beginning of life—Eros first of gods. In her is the goal. I rest here with Helen.'

'Fool,' I said, 'Quote your Faustus. I go further.'

V.

Further—but a hundred Liliputian tethers prevent me, the white nerves which tie soul to skin. And the whole air is aching with epidermical magnetism.

Further, further. But Troy is the birth-place of my home-sickness. Troy is more than a patriotism, for it is built of my very flesh; the remembrance of it is a fire that sticks and tears when I would pull it off.

But further. One last look at Troilus where he stands by the western gate, staring over the plain. Further. When I have learnt the truth, I will return and build a new palace with domes less ominously like breasts, and there I will invent a safer Helen and a less paradoxical Cressid, and my harem will be a library for enlightenment.

VI.

Here are pagodas of diminishing bells. The leopard sleeps in the depth of his rosy cavern, and when he breathes it is a smell of irresistible sweetness; in the bestiaries he is the symbol of Christ in his sepulchre.

This listening conch has collected all the rumours of pantheism; the dew in this veined cup is the sacrament of nature, while these pale thuribles worship in the dark with yellow lamps and incense.

Everywhere alchemical profusion—the golden mintage of glades and ripples, vigils of passion enriched with silver under the fingers of the moon; everywhere lavishness, colour, music; the smoothness of machinery, incredible and fantastic ingenuities. God has lost his half-hunter in the desert.

But we have not come to worship among these Gothic beeches, for all their pillars and the lace-work of their green windows. We are looking for other things than churches.

VII.

Trees, the half fossilised exuberances of a passionate life, petrified fountains of intemperance—with their abolition begins the realm of reason.

Geometry, lines and planes, smooth edges, the ordered horror of perspectives. In this country there are pavements bright and sleek as water. The walls are precipices to which giants have nailed a perpetual cataract of marble. The fringes of the sky are scalloped with a pattern of domes and minarets. At night, too, the down-struck lamps are pyramids of phantom green and the perfect circle they make upon the pavement is magical.

Look over the parapet of the Acropolis. The bridges go dizzily down on their swaying catenaries, the gull's flight chained fast. The walls drop clear into the valley, all the millions of basalt blocks calcined into a single red monolith, fluted with thirstily shining organ pipes, which seem for ever wet. There are no crevices for moss and toad-flax and even the claws of the yellow lichen slip on its polished flanks.

The valley is all paved and inlaid with rivers of steel. No trees, for they have been abolished.

'Glorious unnature,' cries the watcher at the parapet. His voice launches into the abyss, following the curve of the bridges. 'Glorious unnature. We have triumphed.'

But his laughter as it descends is like a flight of broken steps.

VIII.

Let us abandon ourselves to Time, which is beauty's essence. We live among the perpetual degenerations of apotheoses. Sunset dissolves into soft grey snow and the deep ocean of midnight, boundless as forgetfulness or some yet undiscovered Pacific, contracts into the green puddle of the dawn. The flowers burn to dust with their own brightness. On the banks of ancient rivers stand the pitiful stumps of huge towers and the ghosts of dead men straining to return into life. The woods are full of the smell of transience. Beauty, then, is that moment of descent when apotheosis tilts its wings downwards into the gulf. The ends of the curve lose themselves parabolically somewhere in infinity. Our sentimental eyes see only the middle section of this degeneration, knowing neither the upper nor the lower extremes, which some have thought to meet, godhead and annihilation.

Old Curiosity Shops! If I have said 'Mortality is beauty,' it was a weakness. The sense of time is a symptom of anaemia of the soul, through which flows angelic ichor. We must escape from the dust of the shop.

Cloistered darkness and sleep offer us their lotuses. Not to perceive where all is ugly, eaten into by the syphilis of time, heart-sickening—this is beauty; not to desire where death is the only consummation—wisdom.

Beauty.

Night is a measureless deep silence: daybreak brings back the foetid gutters of the town. O supreme beauty of a night that knows no limitations—stars or the jagged edges of cock-crowing. Desperate, my mind has desired it: never my blood, whose pulse is a rhythm of the world.

At the other extreme, Beatrice lacks solidity, is as unresponsive to your kisses as mathematics. She too is an oubliette, not a ray of life; an oubliette that, admittedly, shoots you upwards into light, not down to death; but it comes to the same thing in the end.

What then is the common measure? To take the world as it is, but metaphorically, informing the chaos of nature with a soul, qualifying transience with eternity.

When flowers are thoughts, and lonely poplars fountains of aspiring longing; when our actions are the poem of which all geographies and architectures and every science and all the unclassed individual odds and ends are the words, when even Helen's white voluptuousness matches some candour of the soul—then it will have been found, the permanent and living loveliness.

It is not a far-fetched, dear-bought gem; no pomander to be smelt only when the crowd becomes too stinkingly insistent; it is not a birth of rare oboes or violins, not visible only from ten to six by state permission at a nominal charge, not a thing richly apart, but an ethic, a way of belief and of practice, of faith and works, mediaeval in its implication with

the very threads of life. I desire no Paphian cloister of pink monks. Rather a rosy Brotherhood of Common Life, eating, drinking; marrying and giving in marriage: taking and taken in adultery; reading, thinking, and when thinking fails, feeling immeasureably more subtly, sometimes perhaps creating.

Arduous search for one who is chained by his desires to dead carcases, whose eyes are dimmed with tears by the slow heart-breaking twilights full of old family ghosts laid in lavender, whose despair cries out for opiate and anodyne, craving gross sleep or a place on the airy unsupported pinnacles which hang in the sterile upper chambers of ether.

Ventre à terre, head in air—your centaurs are your only poets. Their hoofs strike sparks from the flints and they see both very near and immensely far.

THE EXILE.

I AM kept with walls of iron from the place
Where once the beechen shadow-trellised lane
Held visions of thy presence, and I pace
The outer dust in poverty and pain.

Amid the murmuring of the summer rain
Adrip on leaves, amid the wanton race
Of the frolic winds, sounds only one refrain,
'I am barred thy presence, banished from thy face.'

Hast thou perchance some secret-builded bower
Wrought in the breast of this stern battlement,
Whence unperceived thou watchest, hour by hour,

Such as are wanderers in the wilderness,
How some go by with song, and some lament,
And some are striken dumb with bitterness?

II.

THE POET'S TASK.

I, THAT have merged my grief in sighing ocean,
Scoured the blue fields of heaven on joy, my star,
Laughed with the curving lips of light in motion,
Prayed the deep prayers of waters echoing far,

Now stoop a slave to unknown force, to fashion
From clay of words, pale image of that Form
Whose eyes were starry with the young spring's passion
Whose dancing feet were wingèd with the storm.

To have ransacked sorrow's treasury, twined strange blooms
In the crown of life, culled from no dew-fed field;
To have pitted valour of soul against those dooms
Gods bow to, charged the ranks that cannot yield,

Was not enough: but swayed by some strange madness
I must be sculpturing in sweat and pain
From marble of my victory and my sadness
Shrines to dream-deities, beautiful and vain.

III.

GOD called me to his side
Saying, My ignorant child, behold this glass.
Here while the ripples you call centuries glide
Over the little sandy stretch of time,
Your carnivals of ignorance and crime
Faithfully enfigured for my gazing pass.

You have asked first to be wise
Then take my glass
And drain the utter truth with unveiled eyes.

And loudly I replied :
Lord of all worlds and what we know not else,
Grasp thou this dim reflector thou hast made,
This little human soul, where the confused
Images jostle whereon I have mused
Of all thy sickening heavens and fearful hells.

Wisdom is thine alone :
My soul's glass tells
But what thou orderedst and hast foreknown.

Pallid he waxed, the Omnipotent all-vast,
Tokening he dared not this. Then love-upbuoyed
I struck his trembling hand, and seized and cast
That shameful mirror down the unechoing void.

IV.

NOW from light of the sun
My eyes are hidden : I live my days
Asking none of his rays.

All is over and done,
Save in the shadowed place, the cave,
To list the musical wave

Fill full each green recess
Of curious-carven creek and pool
For ever shadow-cool.

Ah, the deep caress
Of the running wave . . . where lingers yet
The voice of a long regret.

All deeply stirred pain
When the beloved shadow grows
Murmurous with echoes

Bringing to life again
All the beauty a heart has known
And made its own.

TWO FRAGMENTS FROM THE SPANISH.

[Translated by *Alvaro Velez Ladron de Guevara.*]

I.

LEARN oh flowers from me
What yesterday leaves to-day;
For yesterday I was a glory,
To-day not even my own shadow am I.
The morn yesterday was my cradle,
The night gave me my coffin,
Without light should I have died—
But the moon lent me her light,
For amongst you none
Avoideth death that cometh in this wise.—
Sweet consolation the Carnation
Is to my brief span,
For the gods who allowed me a day
Gave scarcely two to her;
Ephemeral of the orchard
Lived I, amongst the crimson.—
The jasmine is a flower of beauty;

Two Fragments from the Spanish.

Brief her life,
For she counts but few more hours
Than her star has rays ;
If amber quickened into blossom
In this flower her life would be contained.—
The stock, though her fragrance be coarse
Lives through the whole of May
But I would die a glory
And not live like the stock.—
To no flower the sun concedes
Terms more generous
Than to the sublime sunflower—
Methuselah amongst flowers.
Many flattering eyes I saw in her leaves.
Learn oh flowers from me
What yesterday gives to-day—
For yesterday I was a glory,
To-day not even my own shadow am I.

Two Fragments from the Spanish.

II.

From Romance.

THUS Riselo sang
At his guitar with three strings.
He of the white cape
And of the black ribs,
He that has moreover
Fooled a siren,
Device against false ones
Who sing and cause annoyance.
How easy she made it,
She whose voice he forgot.
For love that is both bird and child
If not a free gift, flies away.
I say that thus he was,
Singing with the treble of a crow.
And hearing him were four corners,
Two streets, and a tavern.

FABLES.

WHO taught the centaur first to drink
Ladling his huge hands from the brink—
When other monsters lie and lap
The waters like a fruitful pap ?—

The same who by ingenious ways
Taught the chameleon his rays
To take from leaves of tow'ring trees
Strung thick with dew-bells that the bees
Set ringing, till they bring the honey,
Thrilled with music, gold with money
Back to their castles in the clouds—
And the chameleon, his crowds
Of foes to fight with, has two eyes
That travel sideways, no surprise
On any side. He swiftly sees
All—flowers, slow floating birds and bees.

The gentle, loving unicorn
Will never eat the grass—
All bushes have too many thorns
Their leaves are made of brass,

Fables.

His horn is given him to take
The soft fruit from the trees,
'Please grasp my horn and roughly shake,
O nymph, among those leaves;
This pear transfixed upon my horn;
I cannot reach'—beyond the brim;
Clutched at; she misses; it has gone
'Alas! You've got it!' 'I can't swim.'

To comb a satyr's silken beard
Arabian travellers aspire,
They beg, they bribe; more loved than feared
The satyr trots to take his hire—
Fawning, he takes from outstretched hand
Such fruit his eyes have sometimes seen
On swaying branches where the land
Sighs in a soft wind and the green
Leaves shake beneath the nightingale.
Thus cajoled, they can reach his beard
Where gums lie, gathered from the frail
Flowers he feeds on, where no voice is heard.

FOUNTAINS.

THIS night is pure and clear as thrice refinèd silver.
Silence, the cape of Death, lies heavy
Round the bare shoulders of the hills.
Faint throbs and murmurs
At moments growing to a mutter, then subsiding,
Fill the night with mystery and panic.
The honey-tonguèd arguings of fountains
Stir the air with flutes and gentle voices.—

The graven fountain-masks suffer and weep—
Curved with a smile, the poor mouths
Clutch at a half-remembered song
Striving to forget the agony of ever laughing,—
Laughing while they hear the secrets
Echoed from the depths of Earth beneath them.

This half-remembered song—
This flow of sad-restrainèd laughter
Jars with the jets of youthful water
Springing from the twisted masks,
For this is but the birth of water;

Fountains.

And singing joyfully
It springs upon the world
And wanders ceaselessly
Along its jewelled valleys to the sea,
Rattling like rolls of drums
The shells and pebbles down its bed.

The endless argument of water ceases,
A few drops fall heavily, splashing on the marble:
A sultan with his treasures
Seeking to gain the goodwill of his love,
Pouring before her chains of crackling pearls
And weeping heavy jealous tears
Because she will not heed him.

March 3rd, 1917.

'PSITTACHUS EOIS IMITATRIX ALES AB INDIS.'—*Ovid.*

THE parrot's voice snaps out—
No good to contradict—
What he says he 'll say again:
Dry facts, like biscuits.—

His voice and vivid colours
Of his breast and wings
Are immemoriably old;
Old dowagers dressed in crimpèd satin
Boxed in their rooms
Like specimens beneath a glass
Inviolate—and never changing,
Their memory of emotions dead;
The ardour of their summers
Sprayed like camphor
On their silken parasols
Intissued in a cupboard.

'*Psittachus eois imitatrix ales ab indis.*'

Reflective, but with never a new thought
The parrot sways upon his ivory perch—
Then gravely turns a somersault
Through rings nailed in the roof—
Much as the sun performs his antics
As he climbs the aerial bridge
We only see
Through crystal prisms in a falling rain.

March 1st, 1918.

'WHITSUN.'

HOW hot the bank on which we lie !
The green paint is melted
On the seat near by
So that you cannot touch it !

Small yellow flowers, glazed white with heat
That snap like glass when you pick them,
Grass like a parrot's wing
Burnt yellow here and there
By the Sun's hot stare.

So high this cliff stands from the water
That the drop itself into the cooler sea
Makes a faint wind up here—
Refreshing like cold water drunk from a spring,
Or the wafting of far music
On the bird-wings of a cool wind.

Whitsun.

The sea sleeps ever
Under the Sun's hot trumpet,
While patches of weed float in the water
To make the surface darker—
Where the dying Sun
Has caught the windows of the town

You see their glare reflected in the water
A whorl of quivering sparks
A crackle in the heart of waves—
While catspaws play among the weed
Till the long strands raised on a wave's back
Shine like wet hair in the Sun.

One cloud far out, comes nearer
Takes my soul back to the gray tunnel
Of every year's hard work
Till the young year's holiday, again.

February 28th, 1918.

PINDAR.

PINDAR asleep beneath the planes.
Then every Zephyr shook his shoulder
Struck the pale disks
Sent silver showers beneath the moon
To clothe his young tired body
With those pallid leaves.

And Pan let from his shuttered hive
The snub-nosed honey-bees escape—
A whirr of sound, throb, flutter,
Feather-flight of birds,
And on the poet's lips
The swarm descends to suck his breath.

Now Pan has learnt his song
And sings it on the mountains,
The centaurs gurgling the honeyed waters
Take hands from lips, retire to caves;
Each satyr, ev'ry grape gatherer
Can hear their panick'd rumblings.

Pindar.

Now the song lulls; centaurs breathe again—
To daylight—sniff around; then gallop down the hills;
Beneath the cliffs, poor fishermen
Hear thunder-thudding of the hooves, and sail for sea.
They think a hissing thunderbolt will fall about their
heads.

And from the cliffs the centaurs hear
Flutes like bird-flights through the air
All regular, then flurry of the wings
As breath fails in the player—
And fevered pluckings at a harp
Are birds beneath a canopy of leaves

Who preen their feathers, strike their beaks
Upon each quill, re-echoing
With air-born ecstasy.—
Could one imprison fire within a pipe of glass
To catch the surge and shrinkage of its flames,
I think we'd have in one small pipe

A man could play on,
Every plunge through chasms where the winds play,
Through bell-clear ringing sounds of rain,
Through painted distances aloof as dreams,
And every beat their wings make on clouds
Reverberant as caverns.—

Pindar.

And with these flute-sounds came the floundering
Of horns that play among the waves
Like porpoises who roll
Against the stiffened backs of water
That the waves flap
When they break sonorously.

They say that every sound upon the earth
Is mirrored echoed in the upper air
And never dies; so when the sound
The centaurs heard from passing galleys
Were washing like young tides
Among the clashing cymbals we call stars—

They broke in foam against the songs
The sirens sang, and the stifled cry
Of Sappho falling to her death—
And still there rose the lyre-strung voice
Of Pindar fresh, and honey-sweet,
Rejuvenate in spite of Pan.

February 11th, 1918.

NOTE. There are two legends of Pindar. One tells how when he was asleep in a wood, whilst quite a baby, a swarm of bees settled on his lips. The other describes how Pan stole Pindar's song, and sang it on the mountains. In this poem these two incongruous elements have been combined. It is on the same principle that bad Greek wine is improved by the addition of rancid honey.

OUTSKIRTS.

THE gold voice of the sunset was most clearly in the air
As I wandered through the outskirts of the town.

And here disposed upon the grass, I see
Confetti-thick the amorous couples,—
What thoughts, what scenes, evoke, evaporate
In leaden minds like theirs?
Can I create them? These things
Which mean the happiness of multitudes?
A river bank, grass for a dancing floor,
The concertina's wail, and then the darkening day.

Raise your eyes from ground to trees
And see them stretch elastically
Tall and taller,—then look along
The banks all frayed of the canal
Where we are sitting,—the water
Lies like a sword
With marks of rust
Where the sun has caught it.

Outskirts.

Lie back and listen,
Watch the reflections.
You see the ripples run among the leaves,
Brush them aside, like painted birds
That sing, within the lattices
The sun's hot bars make with the branches.
In China I am told, my dear,
The temples are outlined with bells
That swing in the wind, or clash
Beneath the rain-showers.
So when these ripples play among the trees
Or any insect drops upon the water
The rings and circles spread
Make the whole trees shiver,
And far down you hear
Clash upon clash, the ringing
Of the bells that jangle with the leaves.

You cannot pierce those distances?
Look up! Look up!
Night is slowly coming to fill the valleys,
Drench the hills, and free us
From the suffocation of the sunset.
On lands all turbulent with heat
The small white houses dancing
On the rim of the horizon,—like aproned children

Outskirts.

In a schoolyard—are stilled.
The far-off hills stand solitary
Made yellow by the sun.
Beneath them where the river winds
You hear the spirting of a gramophone—
A fountain playing with discoloured water;
And the strumming of a piano,
Too far for voice to carry
Jerks like a mote before our eyes.
For all the instruments men make
Play on a public holiday,
That birdlike we may play upon a reed,
Or let a nightingale we 've made
Sing among our trees of sentiment.

December 31st, 1917.

REBELLION.

IF I were what I would be, and could break
The buttressed fortress of stupidity
Where laws are sentinels, and lies the masonry,
Surrounded with inertia, weedy lake,
Where centuries of mud lie curdled, and the fake
Grandeur of cardboard turrets, solemn puppetry—
The Gods are blinking at us sleepily,
Tired of our games, the muddles that we make,
The bloodshed, idol-worshipping, the chess
of king, queen, castle, bishop, knight and pawn—
The rigid squares of black and white, they dress
with their perpetual challenge;—faded, worn,
Are all the creeds and praises you profess
To weary Gods that stretch themselves and yawn.

CONFESSIONAL.

I COULD explain
The complicated lore that drags the soul
From what shall profit him
To gild damnation with his choicest gold.
But you
Are poring over precious books and do not hear
Our plaintive, frivolous songs;
For we in stubborn vanity ascend
On ladders insecure,
Toward the tottering balconies
To serenade our painted paramours;
Caught by the lure of dangerous pale hands,
Oblivion 's heavy lure on sleepless eyes
That cheat between unrest and false repose.
And we are haunted
By spectral Joy once murdered in a rage,
Now taking shape of Pleasure,
Disguised in many clothes and skilful masks.

Confessional.

I could disclose
The truth that hangs between our lies
And jostles sleep to semi-consciousness ;
Truth, that stings like nettles
Our frail hands dare not pluck
From out our garden's terraced indolence.
We are not happy,
And you make us dumb with loving hands
Reproachful on our lips,
Nor can we sob our sorrows on your breast,
For we have bartered diamonds for glass,
Our tears for smiles,
Eternity for now.

ROSE.

WHAT do you ask of me with your beauty, what are you urging
Of labour and painful aspiring to flatter your perfection,
What secretness of love with terrible blushes surging
Unseen, have found in you at last their passionate reflection?

What dreams that lovers knew, as sleep with subtle magic
Tore off the rags of life and made her dance with body spangled;
Drew back the vacant hours, the tedious and the tragic,
And showed the glittering souls from bodies we had mangled.

What dreams have made you, emblem of longing and love that has died unrequited,
And all lost joys and tears and beauty passionately given
Winked at by folly, secured by the butcher, danced on and slighted,
Now resurrected to show their slayers the colour of Heaven.

You have burst from the mire with your joy, you are pining and bleeding,
The scent of you poignant with sorrowful love,—O memories clinging!
What do you ask of my soul with such fierceness of pleading
I that was glad to forget—what do you need of my singing?

ANALYSIS.

I WAS born in a moment of doubt
Between joy and pain,
In a moment of jealousy
Between desire and hate.
The fates had forged my spirit to a sword
Then melted it
Into a drinking cup.
They shattered it to fragments as they sipped,
And made a mirror of its brittleness.
The perplexity of many dreams, I am,
The trivial roses at a funeral
That will not pine at death.
I am the day before disaster,
The morning after feasting,
The ball that tosses between Grief and Hope,
Alighting never in their clever play.
I am the restlessness of inexpression,
The indolence of voices
Stilled with sleep.

REVISION.

THE scandal-monger after all is right—
The old and cunning voice with wearying repetition
Is justified in all dull words and warnings.
I see at last how you,
Spendthrift of passion
In love's bankruptcy,
Borrow new beauty from each passing face—
How being too lavish you did steal
From generous hands—
You are the idol builder and the robber of temples,
Praising with passionate psalms
The thing you cannot worship—
And yet your prayers have stirred
Belief in us—
We see beyond the false and weary face
Into your haggard soul and trust from pity—
We hear beyond the idle music of your voice,
A wisdom taught by cruelty
And a tired scorn of treachery and guile—

Revision.

We see your wounds and weep,
You meet our pity with a traitor's kiss—
No,
You are schooled in suffering and schooled
In teaching pain to others—
And all that mob of furious accusation
To which you turn the cheek, or curse so well,
Are but the ghosts
of bodies you have murdered,
That drive you on in vengeance to fresh crime.

ROMANCE.

WHEN I am weary at the antic chance,
The hobby horses and the wooden lance,
The hope and fear in jugglery, and see
How starved the juggler, mean and miserly,
And life a laboured trick—the years advance
A shrilling chorus in affected dance
With lust of many eyes that watch and wink
Fixed on them ; or a clown in feverish pink
will draw gross laughter by a hideous prance—
Vulgarity and sin and souls askance,
Where fiddles squeal and all the follies spin—
Till, when the stage is empty, Harlequin
Through curtained silence trips as from a trance
with blushing flowers for Columbine—Romance.

GOURMET.

HOW often, when the thought of suicide
With ghostly weapon beckons us to die,
The ghosts of many foods alluring glide
On golden dishes, wine in purple tide
To drown our whim. Things danced before the eye
Like tasselled grapes to Tantalus; the sly
Blue of a curling trout, the battened pride
of ham in frills, complacent quails that lie
Resigned to death like heroes—July peas,
A muffin or a crumpet, tea to drink
And honey gathered from the clover bees—
A peach with velvet coat, some prawns in pink,
A slice of beef carved deftly, Stilton cheese,
And cup where berries float and bubbles wink.

RETURN.

THE curtains are drawn as though it still were night,
A slip of dawn between them is a dangling silver ribbon ;
And all about the room is quietness—Each patient chair
Erect, alert, in place. A letter on the table and a book
Lie as you left them, now bereft of purpose—
Garish a little in the room's sedateness, you
Returning dressed so frivolously in all your coloured clothes !
How grey and sober, full of placid wit
The furniture, the pictures on the wall ;
How steely swift the light, stabbing you to the heart
As you stand at the window, bright as rushing blood.
Garish your hair, your shoes, your startling chalky face,
And white, white gloves. . . .
What time is it ? . . . Still ticks the tireless clock,
with face grimacing . . . nearly six it is . . .
Yet hurries not nor lingers, like our hearts,
For in its dial eternity is housed,—
A cock should crow . . . there are no cocks in town !
But a water cart with surly noise below
Grates unconcerned along the disconsolate street,
How cold and how familiar all these things,
To you so lonely in the enormous dawn
Slowly unfastening that vermillion dress. . . .

ISLANDS.

AS launched upon the loneliness of time
We float and dream of what the waves conceal,
Each like a thought that rolls with rapid zeal
Succeeded by a breaker of fierce crime,
Or curling passion, or a rhythm of rhyme,
Or indolent ripple sighing at the keel—
Beyond us though our fettered longings reel,
The lulled horizon sleeps, the still hours climb.—
So toss our weary ships, till from afar
Our visioned island rises suddenly,
Where palaces like cloudy colours are,
With scented gardens terraced to the sea,
The silver steps to our appointed star
Where gleams the spires that pierce eternity.

PREDESTINATION.

THE clergyman's daughter (for she claimed
That parentage) conducted me
Down streets truncated, like things maimed
In creative brutality.

Then in her ordinary room,
Like seven hundred in a row
Shortly I came to know
Her malediction and doom.

Having once laid my head upon
Her bosom, I could ausculate
Things hard and bitter she had done,
Inexorable things, and great

Ordinances; then, with the drink
Clairvoyant, I observed her mind
Like a column of steel or zinc
With graven numbers ranked and lined.

While far below the endearing names
Reeled off, I caught a small, still word
The distant sharpening of a sword
The rustle of eternal flames.

CLERK'S SONG.

AFTER the office hours chime away
And hurrying souls drift homeward, one by one
The long shadows that follow the dead sun
Wake, and become coherent, just as a
Sequence of words is strung into a lay ;

Their cool blue fingers recreate my thought,
They slant in curious shapes across the bricks
A cube, a hippogriff, a crucifix,
A grape cluster that drips its crimson draught
Of Anaesthesia, as I have long sought.

Among the chimneys I can just discern
Cloud-coveys, as of cranes and pelicans,
Some jewelled like macaw or peacock fans
One more fantastical, a gilt wyvern
Joyously hunting down wide grades,—that burn

With hazy sunset, calling a wild call,
While, to the darkening corner of my room
Gigantic masters for their purpose come
And watch me, ranged on black thrones round the wall
So I can gather healing from them all.

SUNRISE.

THEY give; the vedettes of night go scampering in with ebon faces,
The stars, their spear-points, wane; pull, Pyrois, Eous!
After them! The black Host yields, and the white Host chases,
Pull, Aethon, Phlegon! baptise them with fire; never a truce
Till to their cellars basalt-black, behind their columns of porphyry
Charnel stinking, they creep and cry like the damned of apocalypse,
'O Hills, cover us! O dark cliffs, make ruin on our obscenity!'
Coal-hoofed Satan crouches and mourns; Mahound's pale crescent dips.
Vanguard with long scarlet trumpets, set your feet on the seas and blare
Wild Reveillé whose light, as sound, echoes on every brazen tower;

Sunrise.

Run before his face, bright clouds like phoenicopters, but more rare,
Wine-red staining the early air, shaking your coloured plumes in showers.
His stiff-maned team strain after, and part the flames like meadow-grass
Roofs and trees break into laughter of rippling light, when they behold
What perfect glory shines upon the limpid geometric space,
The life, the resurrection, the dear and pitiless head of gold.

LITTLE MOTHER OF SORROWS.

LITTLE mother of sorrows,
What is her desire ?
'Pence, to buy a drop of milk
And a few coals for a fire.

My baby gets no milk from me
He's crying out for food ;
I don't know who his daddy is
But one that was no good.

Yes, sir, I used to walk the streets
Before I got so ill,
And now I sell spring flowers or beg
Since there's two mouths to fill.'

Little mother of sorrows
With holes in your thin shoes,
And little son of sorrows
With your bare pink toes,

No one in this midland town
Cares for you at all,
So go into the workhouse,
Or drown in the canal.

PANDEMOS.

HERE sits the violate queen of all men's lust
Pornê, as old as cities, yet as young
And strong as water
Pornê, with the red mouth, and soft sweet tongue
And little white feet dabbling in the dust
Who never lacks a priest, nor wants a daughter.

Look on her, all you people passing by;
See, she can make her face more fair than you
More white in hue
Her skin against the garment of cramosy
And swaggering tulip-scarlet, and winking gold
Clamped, patterned, manifold
Under the two full firm rounds of her breasts
Betwixt whom, clean and cold
A virgin's pearl, for immaculate childhood rests.

Spit on her, with the red stones in her hair;
Laugh at her languid posturings on some fell
Of young she-leopard; clouded in the smell
Of poisonous Eastern incense, or of rare
Unholy arums, and red flowers on graves,
Or, riding a goat shameless and stripped bare
Lash her, because she is unchampioned;
Curse her, because she laves
Her robes in her own blood to make them look more red.

Pandemos.

Her own blood, passer-by, she gave to you
Knowing you had good money in your purse,
You taught her mouth to curse
Her body, all unholy things to do,
You taught her from the darkness of your heart,
And yet you pass, and wonder
What devil's son it was that pulled her under
Forgetting that Rich Man who played the devil's part.

'Let his soul rest in peace, for he has paid.'
Not so, you queen whose body has no bloom,
Not so, red flower whom
Men have drunk empty of honey; you have still
Chastening wherewith to make the strong afraid
Behind your scarlet petals; you can fill
Graves with a silent company of fools
Where nerve and man's blood cools.

We need you, so we peg you down with laws
That fit your shame to our hypocrisy.
We have forgotten why
The Galilean saved you from our kind,
But hit and stroke you with the self same paws.
Oh write your bitter words, that we may find
Them in our flesh, and kneel to you, and own
We reap the ugly things that we have sown.

A NEW BALLAD OF DIVES AND LAZARUS.

DIVES was a rich man
And had a silk bed,
And Lazarus worked for Dives
To get his meat and bread.

Lazarus worked for Dives
With a hundred of his kind,
And all his night was weariness,
And all his day was grind.

'Now Dives, Master Dives,
Our lives ooze out for you,
Till our chests and cheeks get hollow,
And our lips are pale and blue.'

'We've children in the tenements
A-crying out for milk,
While you can dine off wild fowl,
And you can sleep on silk.

A New Ballad of Dives and Lazarus.

To give us more a penny or two
Is but a little thing ;
You pay a pound for a working man
And a hundred for a ring.'

Dives grieved at their lack of thank,
And turned away his face ;
So Lazarus went out on strike,
And another took his place.

For lack of meat did Lazarus
Get weakly and get sick,
Till sores came out on his body
That never a dog would lick.

Now Dives was a good man
And just in all men's sight ;
So when he died he went to heaven
As is a just man's right.

And Lazarus was a foul man
That cursed against his master ;
Whereat the Seven Deadly Sins
Haled him to Hell the faster.

THE PROPHET.

WHEN the glory of the Lord comes, it's like a mighty wind,
You hear it roar and thunder in the forests there behind
And when the blast is on you and the rocks begin to nod,
Your soul flaps like a pennon in the holy wind of God.

Then you fly like an eagle, and run like a wolf,
Hunt the roads till sundown, and brood on the gulf,
You are dumb as a sepulchre, for no man can afford
To miss the stinging music of the glory of the Lord.

Far, far beneath you do the great sister seas
Bellow one to other, and fall upon their knees,
The sons of God are out, and set a veil upon the moon:
They tell the seven stars that the Lord is in his noon.

Yes, it's given to a few men to run before the wind
And hear it roar and thunder in the forests there behind;
And when the blast is on them, and the rocks begin to nod
To feel their souls as thistledown in the holy wind of God.

A SONG FOR GROCERS.

HEAVEN bless grocers' shops wherein
Raisins are with tawny skin,
Murrey wine, and green liqueurs,
Curious spice in canisters,
Honest ham, and mother tea
Isinglass and carroway,
Rennet, vinegar, and salt
That honour has, and clear cobalt:
Coffee, that swart Mussulman,
Caviar the Caspian,
Suave oil, angry condiments,
Anchovies, and sweet essence
Of clove and almond, honeycomb,
Jam our English orchards from,
Portly cheeses full of mould,
Sugars and treacles brown or gold;
Soap, to keep us pure, and white
Candles, the slim sons of light,
Butter like the flow'r of gorse
Wheat meal fine and oat meal coarse,

A Song for Grocers.

Soda for our maid's service,
Sago, tapioca, rice
An economic trinity,
Bacon, friend ham's affinity.
Bananas, which the People please,
Proletarian oranges,
While of fruits in syrup a
Frequent cornucopia.
Eggs fresh within and white without
Cocoa of origin devout
Nuts and string and brooms and mops
Saveloys and lollipops—
God, be good to grocers' shops!

WAR-STRIKE.

LAST night we nearly killed a scab. The swine!
Kicked his face open. Did he pray or whine?
Not he! But 'Kill me if you like,' he said,
'I don't know I'd not just as soon be dead
With men like you stopping steam coal to feed
Our ships in the cold sea—and all for greed!
God! haven't any of you boys away
In France there, fighting?' When he'd had his say
We knocked him in the mud and thrashed him well.
The fool! Of course I've children in that hell
The trenches: but by Christ! Children or not
I'm loyal to my union and my lot.

SUGAR FOR THE BIRDS.

I.

SINGERIE.

SUMMER afternoon in Hell!
Down the empty street it fell
Pantaloon and Scaramouche—
Tongues like flames and shadows louche—
Flickered down the street together
In the spangled weather.
Flames, bright singing-birds that pass,
Whistled wares as shrill as grass
(Landscapes clear as glittering glass)
Whistled all together:
Papagei, oh Papagei,
Buy our greenest fruits, oh buy
Melons misty from the bloom
Of mellow moons on some hot night,
Melting in the August light;

Sugar for the Birds.

Apples like an emerald shower,
Nectarines that falling boom
On the grass in greenest gloom,
Peaches bright as parrot's feather
Glistening from the moon's bower ;
Chequered like fritillaries,
Fat and red are strawberries.
Parrot-voices shrill together—
Now they pelt each monkey-face
(Pantaloon with Simian grace)
From the soft gloom till they smother
Both the plumèd head-dresses
with the green fruit-gems that glitter
(Twinkling sharp sounds like a zither).
Sharp each bird-tongue shrills and hisses,
Parrot-voices shrieking bane ;—
Down comes every spangled shutter
with a sudden noise like rain.

II.

THE AVENUE.

IN the huge and glassy room
Pantaloon with his tail-feather
Spangled like the weather
Panached too with many a plume—
Watched the monkey Fanfreluche
Shivering in his gilded ruche
Fawn upon the piano keys—
Flatter till they answer back
Through the scale of centuries
Difference between white and black.
Winds like hurricanes of light
Change the blackest vacuums
To a light-barred avenue—
Semitones of might and right;
Then from matter life comes.
Down that lengthy avenue
Leading us we know not where—
Sudden views creep through the air;
Oh the keys we stumble through!

The Avenue.

Jungles splashed with violent light,
Promenades all hard and bright,
Long tails like the swish of seas
Avenue of piano keys.
Meaning comes to bind the whole,
Fingers separate from thumbs,
Soon the shapeless tune comes :
Bestial efforts at man's soul.
What though notes are false and shrill—
Black streets tumbling down a hill ?
Fundamentally
I am you and you are me—
Octaves fall as emptily.

III.

THE BLACKAMOOR GOES TO HELL

WHEN I was young, and first began
To think and dress and be a man,
I said: 'Deliberately bad
I'll be,—both sober, cross and sad,
Because they say that Hell is hot. . . .'
But now I wish that I had not!
I pray for little golden fires
To cling about my flesh like wires
Wherein dark singing birds are caught;
But all my wishes count for naught.
And as through spangled streets I go,
Like flashing humming-birds, the snow
Among the trees, with bright plumes spread,
Silvers the wool upon my head,
And Blackamoor, no longer proud,
Is pure as any sparkling cloud!

IV.

SWITCHBACK.

BY the blue wooden sea—
Curling laboriously,
Coral and amber grots
(Cherries and apricots)
Ribbons of noisy heat
Binding them head and feet,
Horses as fat as plums
Snort as each bumpkin comes.
Giggles like towers of glass
(Pink and blue spirals) pass,
Oh how the Vacancy
Laughed at them rushing by.
'Turn again, flesh and brain,
Only yourselves again!
How far above the ape
Differing in each shape,
You with your regular
Meaningless circles are!'

V.

FALSETTO SONG.

WHEN I was young, in ages past
My soul had cast
Man's foolish shape,
And like a black and hairy ape—
My shadow, he
Now mimics me.
Follows slinking in my shade
Through the corridors of life
(Stifling twixt the walls I made
With the mud and murderous knife),
Takes the pulse of my black heart,
Never once controls my will,
Apes me selling in the mart
Song-birds hate did kill.

STOPPING PLACE.

IN highly-varnished noisy heat
As through a lens that does not fit—
The faces jolt in cubes and I
Perceive their odd solidity
And lack of meaning absolute :
For why should noses thus protrude
And to what purpose can relate
Each hair so queerly separate ?
Anchored upon the puff of breeze
As shallow as the crude blue seas,
The coloured blocks and cubes of faces
Seem Noah's arks that shelter races
Of far absurdities to breed
Their queer kind after we are dead.
Blue wooden foliage creaks with heat
And there are woollen buns to eat—
Bright-varnished buns to touch and see
And, black as an Inferno, tea . . .
Then (Reckett's blue)—a puff of wind—
Heredity regains my mind
And I am sitting in the train,

Stopping Place.

While thought becomes like flesh, the brain
Not independent but derived
From hairy matter that half lived—
Identities not round or whole.
A questing beast who thirsts for soul,
The furry vegetation there—
Purring with heat, sucks in the air.
And dust that's gathered in the train—
Protecting flesh, seems almost brain
(That horny substance altering sight);
How strange: intangible is light
Whence all is born, and yet by touch
We live, the rest is not worth much. . . .
The world grows furry now with sleep, . . .
But I must on the surface keep,
While mammoths from the heat are born,
Great clumsy trains with tusk and horn
Whereon the world's too sudden tossed
Through frondage of our mind, and lost.

MYSELF ON THE MERRY-GO-ROUND.

To Robert Nichols.

THE giddy sun's kaleidescope—
The pivot of a switchback world
Is tied to it by many a rope :
The people, (flaunting streamers ;) furled
Metallic banners of the seas,
The giddy sun's kaleidescope
Casts colours on the face of these :
Cosmetics of Eternity,
And powders faces blue as death ;
Beneath the parasols we see
Gilt faces tarnished by sea-breath,
And crawling like the foam, each horse
Beside the silken tents of sea
In whirlpool circles takes his course.
Huge houses, humped like camels, chase
The wooden horses' ceaseless bound ;
The throbbing whirring sun that drags
The streets upon its noisy round
With tramways chasing them in vain,

Myself on the Merry-go-round.

Projects in coloured cubes each face—
Then shatters them upon our brain.
The house-fronts hurl them back, they jar
Upon cross-currents of the noise :
Like atoms of my soul they are,
They shake my body's equipoise,—
A clothes line for the Muse to fly
(So thin and jarred and angular)
Her rags of tattered finery.
Beneath the heat of trees' sharp hue—
A ceaseless whirr, metallic-green,
Sounds like a gimlet shrilling through
The mind, to reach the dazzling sheen
Of meanings life can not decide :
Then words set all awry, and you
Are left upon the other side.
Our senses, each a wooden horse,
We paint till they appear to us
Like life, and then queer strangers course
In our place on each Pegasus.
The very heat seems but to be
The product of some man-made force—
Steam from the band's machinery.
The heat is in a thousand rags
Reverberant with sound, whose dry
Frayed ends we never catch, seem tags

Myself on the Merry-go-round.

Of our unfinished entity ;
And like a stretched accordion
The houses throb with heat, and flags
Of smoke are tunes light plays upon.
The band's kaleidescopic whirr
Tears up those jarring threads of heat
The crowds : plush mantles seem to purr—
Crustacean silk gowns take the beat
From houses ; each reverberates
With this vitality and stir
The giddy heat acerberates.
And in the swirling restaurant
Where liqueurs at perpetual feud
Dispute for sequined lights and taunt
Hot leaves, our dusty souls exude
Their sentiments, while scraps of sense
Float inward from the band and flaunt—
Disturb the general somnolence.

APRICOT JAM.

BENEATH the dancing glancing green
The tea is spread, amid the sheen
of pincenez (glints of thought) ; thus seen
In sharp reflections only, brain
Perceives the world all flat and plain
In rounded segments, joy and pain.
The parasols dance in the sun
Cast wavering nets of shade that run
Across the chattering table's fun,
The laughing faces, and across
Half-shadowed faces looking cross,
And black hair with a bird-bright gloss.
The flashing children stayed and checked,
Smooth indiarubber leaves reflect
Their parrot-green on circumspect
Glazed china where the negroid tea
Reflects the world's obscurity
In high lights such as pincenez see.

Apricot Jam.

And dark leaves with their shadows feather
Muslin frocks like plumes. Together
In the hot and flashing weather,
Bird-high voices shrill and chatter
with the cool and glinting clatter
Tea-cups make, and whispered patter
(Listen, and you 'll get a slap) :
Worlds are small as any map—
And life will come our way—mayhap.

SONG FROM 'THE QUEEN OF PALMYRIA.'

AND shall we never find those diamonds bright
That were the fawn-queen of Palmyria's eyes ?—
Ah, dark hot jewels lie hidden from the sight
Beneath dark palm-trees where the river sighs
Beyond the tomb of young eternities.
And in the desert, lonely flowers weep—
The clouds have such long hair—that tangles Sleep.

TWO NOCTURNES.

I.

VACUUM.

BLOWN through the leaden circles of our hell,
Each wisp of soul, tattered by winds of lust,
Clawed at the voices, beaten like a bell.
No movement ever raised the lifeless dust

As blown beneath the night's enormous pall
We call to you with goatish prance and paces:
Our lips are red as nights of festival
And hell has dyed its fires upon our faces.

These barren bodies may no children breed
To quench the sun with their corrupted breath—
Save these our hearts, our breasts, our bodies feed—
The fruit of love like ours, the worms of death.

Within our brain the darkness slowly fell:
Our eyes' dark vacuum reflects no days—
No voice, no sight, no thought within our hell—
But only flesh our loneliness allays.

II.

'Et L'on Entend à Peine Leurs Paroles.'

MONOTONOUSLY fell the rain
Like thoughts within an empty brain;

The lolling weeds that fattened there
Absorbed the broken lifeless air.

'Do those dim eyes still hold a flame
That leaps to heaven at my name?'

'Mine eyes would hold God's face in sight:
But your lips burned away the light.'

'Within your brain the blood runs high?'
'You came like thought: you licked it dry.'

'Oh we have burnt our souls with lust
Till they are whiter than the dust . . .

Now are they white as purity?'
'You blind mine eyes . . . I cannot see.'

'I am so tired—I fain would creep
To hide within your heart and weep.'

'My heart is dust . . . no tears to shed.'
'But carrion lives—it lives'—I said.

PRESS CUTTINGS.

THE NATION.

The nine original singers, harpies like nightingales, and nightingales like harpies, who sat balefully chirping upon the walls of old Babylon. We are charmed by these ingenious and fertile able young writers.

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT.

None of them sing!

TO-DAY.

They have apparently come to the conclusion that there is some mysterious virtue in originality.

THE MORNING POST.

The second cycle of 'Wheels' will probably annoy the middle-aged critic as much as the first. Once more the air will be darkened by the critical brickbats—'Morbid,' 'Macabre,' 'precious,' unwholesome,' 'insincere,' and other epithets of the kind which the Grisâtres are in the habit of hurling at the heads of each successive generation of Flamboyants. . . . The whole book is the protest of eager and aspiring youth against the exhausted truths which are now no more than living lies. . . . Fifty years hence, its appearance will be remembered as a literary event, as an omen of an intellectual awakening.

'APTERYX' IN THE EGOIST.

'Wheels' is a more serious book (than 'Georgian Poetry'). It is not Mr. S. P. B. Mais' sort of poetry at all. These are not the good boys of the Sixth Form.

THE OBSERVER.

In 1916 an anthology of ultra-modern verse by a little group of young poets flung itself at the critics. The second cycle of 'Wheels' is a challenge like the first. Every page shouts defiance of poetic conventions . . . as resolutely gloomy as ever . . . piling towers of rich imagery to describe squalor. . . . It is a love of truth that makes them shun romantic subjects. They are all practised verse-writers. They are all clever and stimulating.

EVERYMAN.

For men who practice the craft of verse-making, 'Wheels' will be the most interesting book of the year. . . . There are enough splendid sombre pictures and great phrases to justify a dozen volumes of verse.

COMMONWEALTH.

The very cover of the volume is calculated to establish a reign of terror on any respectable bookshelf. Within, the dazed readers' impression is of a riot of many-coloured figures, violently gesticulating, with here and there a tract of impenetrable gloom, pierced by the shrieks of tortured victims.

THE NEW AGE.

My general impression is that the verses were written by people with nerves. . . . On the whole, modern English poetry, in striking contrast to modern Slavonic poetry, for example, suffers from a lack of nerves, which gives it what I am inclined to call a 'woolliness' of outline. . . . Many of the poems in 'Wheels' are almost Slavonic in this respect.

THE GLOBE.

Mr. Blackwell has incurred the gratitude of lovers of literature by the encouragement he has already given to our younger poets, and the debt is increased by his recent publication of 'Wheels'. . . . The second cycle of 'Wheels' is in its way as notable a phenomenon as 'The Yellow Book.

WEEKLY DISPATCH.

On the whole, I think we should be grateful to Mr. Blackwell for 'Wheels'. . . . [NOTE: 'Et tu, Brute?' Editor of 'Wheels'.]

PIONEER.

In 'Wheels' we have discovered nothing to interest us except the press notices of the first cycle published modestly at the end. As the young authors appear to be pleased with their posturing and the remarks it has elicited from indiscreet reviewers, we do not propose to add to their amusement; for amused they must have been if they have any sense of humour, at finding themselves taken seriously by anyone. They are apparently able to pay for the pleasure of publication, but theirs is a form of luxury which should be heavily taxed under the new scheme.

NOTE.

Any reviewer who would like to call upon the Editor, will find her happy to produce photographs of counterfoils of all cheques sent by the contributors during the last three years.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

WHEELS. 1st volume, 1916. Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

Conceived in morbid eccentricity and executed in fierce factitious gloom.—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

We have no doubt whatever that, fifty years hence, the publication of 'Wheels' will be remembered as a notable event in the inner history of English Literature.—*Morning Post.*

Aldous Huxley. *THE BURNING WHEEL.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

Without any doubt an original poet.—*The Nation.*

Edith Sitwell. *THE MOTHER, AND OTHER POEMS.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

In all these poems one thing is clear. They come from within. Miss Sitwell does not describe, she lives in her verse. This very little therefore points a long way.—*The Times.*

Edith and Osbert Sitwell. *20TH CENTURY HARLEQUINADE.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

Every pretty woman carries a vanity bag into which she puts all her most cherished possessions, from a passionate letter from Flanders to a dinky little pink stick of lip-salve. When writers of verses are happy enough to collar publishers they put all the most precious possessions of their hearts into their books—which are vanity bags. . . . [This] vanity bag [is] not so pretty.—*The New Witness.*

E. Wyndham Tennant. *WORPLE FLIT AND OTHER POEMS.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

Mr. Tennant has an unclouded vision and a blessed gift of direct speech.—*The Glasgow Herald.*

Iris Tree. *POEMS.* Privately printed.

Sherard Vines. *THE TWO WORLDS.*
Published by B. H. BLACKWELL.

An extremely vivid and charming poet.—*The Nation.*

Sacheverell Sitwell. *THE PEOPLE'S PALACE.*

This is the most 'advanced' poetry we have had so far; 'advanced' in that it is founded on a theory probably new to this country.—Robert Nichols in *The New Witness.*

We have attributed more to Mr. Sitwell than to any poet of quite his generation. We require of him only ten years of toil.—T. S. Eliot in *The Egoist.*

'The Mayor of Murcia' is almost unreadable for dullness. —Jones (Miss Topsy) in *A* (or *The*) *Common Cause*.

The word '*dire*' shows real observation and imagination. It illuminates—it is the word one might have thought of and didn't.—Jones (Miss) in *A* (or *The*) *Common Cause*. [Editor's Note.—Hoity-toity, Topsy Jones!

OUR STYLISTS.

The People's Palace purports to be a collection of verse by Sacheverell Sitwell. Its sheer inanity is beyond description. The audacity of wasting precious paper, to say nothing of printing ink, on such unadulterated drivel take *(sic)* one's breath away.—*The World*. [Editor's Note.—A society paper, I *believe*.]

Exhibits all the characteristic traits of Mr. Sitwell's rhyming (!): to wit, a rather tortuous and alembicated diction, profusely interspersed with an intricate preciosity of imagery, and far-fetched ideas clothed in elaborate language.—*The Aberdeen Daily Journal*.

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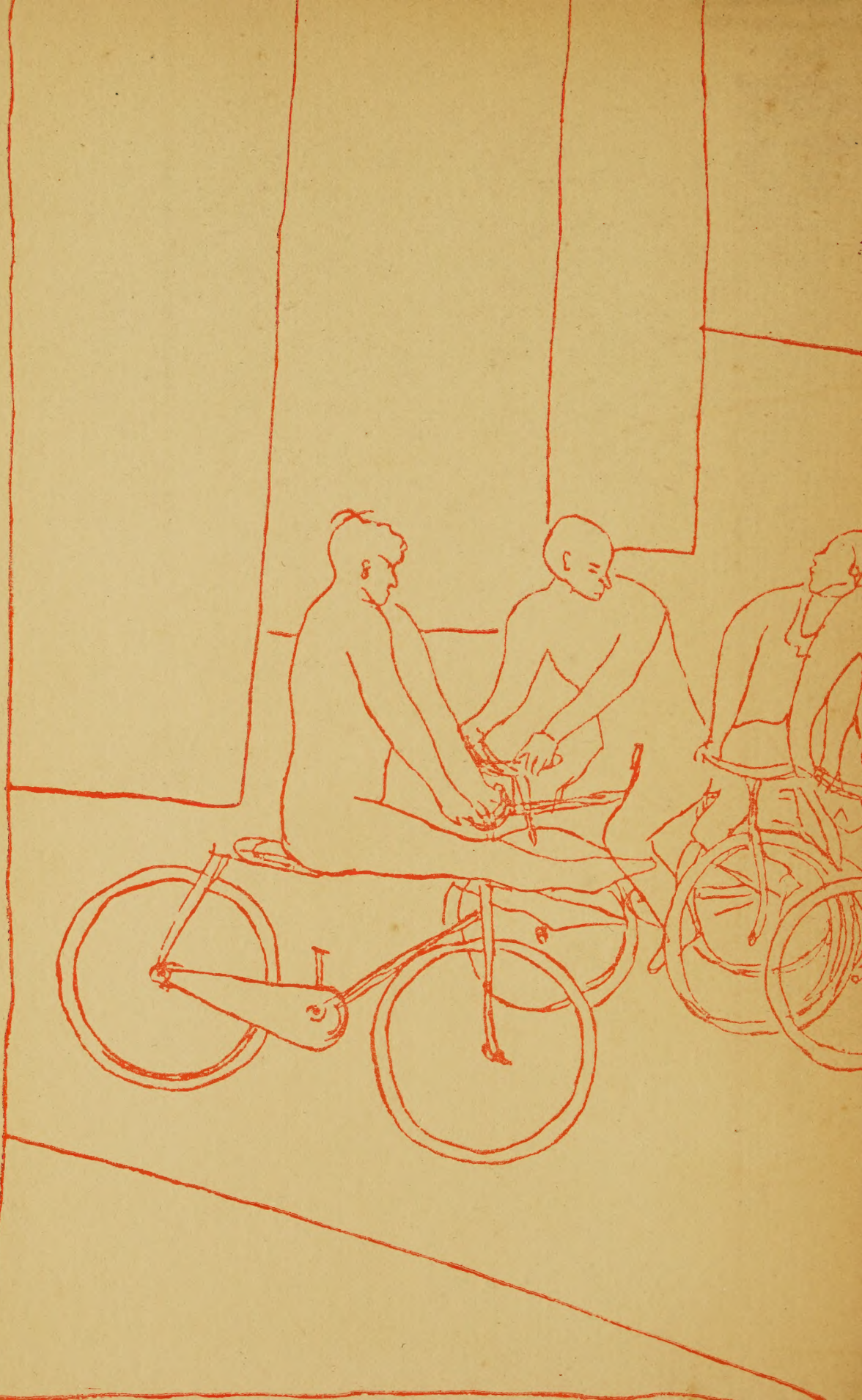

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